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“When God Heals a Hard Heart”

Ezekiel 18

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The Jewish people had two objections about God and their relationship with him: (1) It's not my fault, and (2) God is not fair. This is very much how people feel today! Many people have a low view of personal responsibility and a high view of God being at fault for their circumstances. God addressed these issues in Ezekiel 18. When we study this chapter, we come to the clear conclusion that God is better than fair and that we must take responsibility for our own sins in order to experience the mercies of God.

### Two Objections Jewish People Had With God

#### 1. It's Not My Fault

- a. The proverb quoted in [Ezekiel 18:2](#) wasn't from the book of the same name in the Bible; it was a commonly used saying.
  - i. [Ezekiel 18:2](#) - *“What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge?’ ”*
- b. A saying like this, which is repeated over and over, isn't necessarily true because of the frequency of use.
  - i. Commonly used sayings in our day would include:
    1. “If it doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger.”
    2. “The customer is always right.”
    3. “The pen is mightier than the sword.”
    4. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”
- c. Pastor Gary said: “Another way of saying this is: ‘Mom and Dad ate too much candy, and the kids got the cavities.’ This was the proverb they were quoting as a way to deflect responsibility. This was a way to shift the blame. [They were saying], ‘Mom and Dad have done some things and the only reason we

are in the mess we're in is because of Mom and Dad. We aren't really at fault. We aren't responsible.' ... Every generation was quoting this [proverb]... They were basically saying [that they only worshiped idols because their parents worshiped idols, and they only sacrificed to false idols because their parents sacrificed to false idols]. This plays out in our day in a similar way. 'I'm a cheat because my dad was a cheat. I'm an alcoholic because mom was an alcoholic. I have a bad temper because dad had a bad temper. I lie a little bit because mom lied a little bit.' ... The influence of mom and dad is real, [but] the influence of God is greater! ... At some point we have to stand up and take responsibility for our lives and stop blaming mom and dad. We are living in a generation that wants to blame everybody. ... How about you take responsibility for your life and you start to hand down a new heritage, a different heritage to your children."

- i. **2 Corinthians 5:17** - *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."*
- d. **Ezekiel 18:3** - *" 'As I live, says the Lord God, 'you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.' "*

## 2. God Is Not Fair

- a. Pastor Gary said: "[It's not my fault] dovetails into [God's not fair]. ... [If] they feel like they are living in Babylonia as a result of God's punishment, but they feel like they are only there in Babylonia because they were only following what mom and dad taught them, and so, they don't think they are at fault, then, naturally, if they look at their circumstances and they don't like where they are and they feel like God's punishing them, and they think God's punishing them for something that they are not at fault concerning, well then, naturally, they think that God's not fair."
- b. **Ezekiel 18:25** - *"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"*
- c. Pastor Gary said: "The people were basically saying [that] they wanted to live however they wanted to live, they wanted to blame whomever they want to blame, and they want to get away with whatever they can get away with. [They considered that to be fair]. ... Isn't it beyond fair of God when he says in this chapter... 'Whoever takes responsibility for his or her sins and turns from them, and turns to God, they will be forgiven and they will be given a new heart and a new spirit, and God will not hold their past against them. Isn't that better than fair? That's beyond fair! Where else does this exist? ... If you aren't amazed at his grace, it's because you haven't lived long enough to regret some things in your life. ... God's grace is amazing! It's beyond fair!"
- d. People today have a low view of personal responsibility and a high view of

God not being fair.

### God Is Better Than Fair

3. Every soul belongs to God and thus, we are accountable to him.
  - a. **Ezekiel 18:4** - *“Behold, all souls are Mine...”*
  - b. God has rightful ownership of life, because he is the author, giver, sustainer, and Lord of life.
  - c. The taking of an innocent life is a sinful thing, because all lives belong exclusively to God.
  - d. Every person is accountable to God, and if we deny our sin or blame others for our sin, then we will be condemned for our sin.
  - e. If we acknowledge our sin and repent of our sin, God will be merciful to us and will forgive us.
  
4. Repentance is the pathway to mercy.
  - a. **Ezekiel 18:30** - *“ ‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,’ says the Lord God. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.’ ”*
  - b. To repent means to change the course of your life - to turn from sin and turn to God - because you are sorry for your sin.
  - c. Repentance is a theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and the repentance is a word that is found more than 100 times in the Bible.
    - i. **Matthew 3:1-2** - *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ ”*
    - ii. **Matthew 4:17** - *“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ”*
    - iii. **Acts 3:19** - *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”*
  - d. Pastor Gary shared the story of Dr. Harry Ironside’s 1937 book, *Except Ye Repent*. He quoted the first sentence of the introduction: “Fully convinced in my own mind that the doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today, I have penned this volume out of a full heart.”<sup>1</sup>
    - i. **Luke 13:3** - *“[Jesus said,] I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”*
  - e. Pastor Gary said: “Some churches aren’t talking about repentance. They don’t like that word. The modern church today doesn’t often talk about repentance. The modern church today, instead of saying repentance,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wholesomewords.org/etexts/ironside/repentye.pdf>

preaches tolerance. ... [Repentance] confronts sin. Tolerance either denies it or redefines it altogether. Tolerance is a message that basically will make you feel good in the moment but will not liberate anyone. Tolerance is basically the message, in replacement of repentance, which is an illusion that no one needs changing. [It's believing] that God accepts you just as you are and he made you just as you are, and he's fine with you just as you are; no change necessary. Repentance, on the other hand, requires an honest assessment of one's life against the standard of God's unchanging truth. And, where [our lives] fall short of that perfect standard of God, that's called sin and it requires [our] repentance to get right with God. ... When we get right with God by repenting - turning from sin and turning to God - he not only forgives us, he remembers our sins no more. ... The slate is wiped clean! The record of offenses and crimes have been expunged!"

5. God not only forgives our sins; he remembers them no more.
  - a. [Ezekiel 18:21-22](#) - "*But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.*"
  - b. [Hebrews 8:12](#) - "*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*"
  - c. [Jeremiah 31:34b](#) - "*For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*"
  - d. [Psalm 103:11-12](#) - "*For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*"
6. God is for us and doesn't want anyone to die separated from him.
  - a. [Ezekiel 18:23, 32](#) - "*Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?' says the Lord God, 'and not that he should turn from his ways and live?' ... 'For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord God. 'Therefore turn and live!' "*
  - b. [Ezekiel 33:11](#) - "*Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?' "*
7. Pastor Gary said: "[It's] not enough that God feels badly towards those who are unrepentant towards him, he actually did something about it. Two thousand years ago Jesus [died] on a cross. This is [John 3:16](#): '*For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*' ... Jesus satisfied the wrath of God and assumed the

punishment that was intended for us, though he had committed no sin, he took the penalty for our sin and suffered in our place. ... [This was] something undeserved [and] something completely unearned, that God did for us. And, all we have to do in response is to own-up and accept responsibility. [Repenting and believing] by faith in what Jesus Christ did on that cross to redeem us is enough. That's why Jesus said, '*It is finished.*' God made a way where there was no way, to bring us to him. Why? Because he's better than fair! It's the love of God for us!"

- a. [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) - "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*"

### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Ezekiel 18:1-4, 21-32](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of two objections Pastor Gary mentioned in his outline: It's not my fault and God's not fair. (See #1 and #2 above)
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments concerning [Ezekiel 18:2](#). (See #1c above)
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments about the low view people have regarding personal responsibility. (See #2c and #2d above)
5. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences concerning the ways God is better than fair. (See #3 above)
6. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 18:30](#). (See #4a and #4b above)
7. Spend time talking about the emphasis the Bible places on repentance. (See #4c and #4d above)
8. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the ways many churches have deemphasized repentance and embraced tolerance as the greatest need. (See #43 above)
9. Read and discuss the [Ezekiel 18:21-22](#), [Hebrews 8:12](#), [Jeremiah 31:34b](#), and [Psalm 103:11-12](#). (See #5 above)
10. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11](#). (See #6 above)
11. Spent time talking about [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) and Pastor Gary's remarks concerning the wonderful news that repentance brings forgiveness and restoration! (See #7

above)

12. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)